

PRODUCT SEEMS TO BE IDENTICAL EXCEPT THAT THE PRIOR ART IS SILENT AS TO AN INHERENT CHARACTERISTIC

Where applicant claims a composition in terms of a function, property or characteristic and the composition of the prior art is the same as that of the claim but the function is not explicitly disclosed by the reference, the examiner may make a rejection under both 35 U.S.C. 102 and 103, expressed as a 102/103 rejection. “There is nothing inconsistent in concurrent rejections for obviousness under 35 U.S.C. 103 and for anticipation under 35 U.S.C. 102.” *In re Best*, 562 F.2d 1252, 1255 n.4, 195 USPQ 430, 433 n.4 (CCPA 1977). This same rationale should also apply to product, apparatus, and process claims claimed in terms of function, property or characteristic. Therefore, 35 U.S.C. 102 /103 rejection is appropriate for these types of claims as well as for composition claims.

EXAMINER MUST PROVIDE RATIONALE OR EVIDENCE TENDING TO SHOW INHERENCY

The fact that a certain result or characteristic may occur or be present in the prior art is not sufficient to establish the inherency of that result or characteristic. *In re Rijckaert*, 9 F.3d 1531, 1534, 28 USPQ2d 1955, 1957 (Fed. Cir. 1993)(reversed rejection because inherency was based on what would result due to optimization of conditions, not what was necessarily present in the prior art); *In re Oelrich*, 666 F.2d 578, 581-82, 212 USPQ 323, 326 (CCPA 1981). “To establish inherency, the extrinsic evidence must make clear that the missing descriptive matter is necessarily present in the thing described in the reference, and that it would be so recognized by persons of ordinary skill. Inherency, however, may not be established by probabilities or possibilities. The mere fact that a certain thing may result from a given set of circumstances is not sufficient.” *In re*

Robertson, 169 F.3d 743, 745, 49 USPQ2d 1949, 1950-51 (Fed. Cir. 1999)(citations omitted)(The claims were drawn to a disposable diaper having three fastening elements. The reference disclosed two fastening elements that could perform the same function as the three fastening elements in the claims. The court construed the claims to require three separate elements and held that the reference did not disclose a separate third fastening element, either expressly or inherently.).

“In relying upon the theory of inherency, the examiner must provide a basis in fact and/or technical reasoning to reasonably support the determination that the allegedly inherent characteristic necessarily flows from the teachings of the applied prior art.” *Ex parte Levy*, 17 USPQ2d 1461, 1464 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1990) (emphasis in original) (Applicant’s invention was directed to a biaxially oriented, flexible dilation catheter balloon (a tube which expands upon inflation) used, for example, in clearing the blood vessels of heart patients). The examiner applied a U.S. patent to Schjeldahl which disclosed injection molding a tubular preform and then injecting air into the preform to expand it against a mold (blow molding). The reference did not directly state that the end product balloon was biaxially oriented. It did disclose that the balloon was “formed from a thin flexible inelastic, high tensile strength, biaxially oriented synthetic plastic material.” *Id.* at 1462 (emphasis in original). The examiner argued that Schjeldahl’s balloon was inherently biaxially oriented. The Board reversed on the basis that the examiner did not provide objective evidence or cogent technical reasoning to support the conclusion of inherency.).

In *In re Schreiber*, 128 F.3d 1473, 44 USPQ2d 1429 (Fed. Cir. 1997), the court affirmed a finding that a prior patent to a conical spout used primarily to dispense oil from an oil can inherently performed the functions recited in applicant's claim to a conical container top for dispensing popped popcorn. The examiner had asserted inherency based on the structural similarity between the patented spout and applicant’s disclosed

top, i.e., both structures had the same general shape. The court stated:

[N]othing in Schreiber's [applicant's] claim suggests that Schreiber's container is of a different shape' than Harz's [patent]. In fact, [] an embodiment according to Harz (Fig. 5) and the embodiment depicted in Fig. 1 of Schreiber's application have the same general shape. For that reason, the examiner was justified in concluding that the opening of a conically shaped top as disclosed by Harz is inherently of a size sufficient to allow [] several kernels of popped popcorn to pass through at the same time' and that the taper of Harz's conically shaped top is inherently of such a shape as to by itself jam up the popped popcorn before the end of the cone and permit the dispensing of only a few kernels at a shake of a package when the top is mounted to the container.' The examiner therefore correctly found that Harz established a prima facie case of anticipation.

In re Schreiber, 128 F.3d at 1478, 44 USPQ2d at 1432.

**ONCE A REFERENCE TEACHING PRODUCT APPEARING TO BE
SUBSTANTIALLY IDENTICAL IS MADE THE BASIS OF A REJECTION AND
THE EXAMINER PRESENTS EVIDENCE OR REASONING TENDING TO SHOW
INHERENCY, THE BURDEN SHIFTS TO THE APPLICANT TO SHOW AN
UNOBVIOUS DIFFERENCE**

"[T]he PTO can require an applicant to prove that the prior art products do not necessarily or inherently possess the characteristics of his [or her] claimed product. Whether the rejection is based on inherency' under 35 U.S.C. 102, on *prima facie* obviousness' under 35 U.S.C. 103, jointly or alternatively, the burden of proof is the same...[footnote omitted]." The burden of proof is similar to that required with respect to product-by-process claims. *In re Fitzgerald*, 619 F. 2d 67, 70, 205 USPQ 594, 596 (CCPA 1980) (quoting *In re Best*, 562 F.2d 1252, 1255, 195 USPQ 430, 433-34 (CCPA

1977)).

In *In re Fitzgerald*, the claims were directed to a self-locking screw-threaded fastener comprising a metallic threaded fastener having patches of crystallizable thermoplastic bonded thereto. The claim further specified that the thermoplastic had a reduced degree of crystallization shrinkage. The specification disclosed that the locking fastener was made by heating the metal fastener to melt a thermoplastic blank which is pressed against the metal. After the thermoplastic adheres to the metal fastener, the end product is cooled by quenching in water. The examiner made a rejection based on a U.S. patent to Barnes. Barnes taught a self-locking fastener in which the patch of thermoplastic was made by depositing thermoplastic powder on a metallic fastener which was then heated. The end product was cooled in ambient air, by cooling air or by contacting the fastener with a water trough. The court first noted that the two fasteners were identical or only slightly different from each other. "Both fasteners possess the same utility, employ the same crystallizable polymer (nylon 11), and have an adherent plastic patch formed by melting and then cooling the polymer." *Id.* at 596 n.1, 619 F.2d at 70 n.1. The court then noted that the Board had found that Barnes' cooling rate could reasonably be expected to result in a polymer possessing the claimed crystallization shrinkage rate. Applicant had not rebutted this finding with evidence that the shrinkage rate was indeed different. They had only argued that the crystallization shrinkage rate was dependent on the cool down rate and that the cool down rate of Barnes was much slower than theirs. Because a difference in the cool down rate does not necessarily result in a difference in shrinkage, objective evidence was required to rebut the 35 U.S.C. 102 /103 *prima facie* case.

In *In re Schreiber*, 128 F.3d 1473, 1478, 44 USPQ2d 1429, 1432 (Fed.Cir.1997), the court held that applicant's declaration failed to overcome a *prima facie* case of anticipation because the declaration did not specify the dimensions of either the dispensing

top that was tested or the popcorn that was used. Applicant's declaration merely asserted that a conical dispensing top built according to a figure in the prior art patent was too small to jam and dispense popcorn and thus could not inherently perform the functions recited in applicant's claims. The court pointed out the disclosure of the prior art patent was not limited to use as an oil can dispenser, but rather was broader than the precise configuration shown in the patent's figure. The court also noted that the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences found as a factual matter that a scaled-up version of the top disclosed in the patent would be capable of performing the functions recited in applicant's claim.

See MPEP § 2113 for more information on the analogous burden of proof applied to product-by-process claims.

2112.01 Composition, Product, and Apparatus Claims

PRODUCT AND APPARATUS CLAIMS — WHEN THE STRUCTURE RECITED IN THE REFERENCE IS SUBSTANTIALLY IDENTICAL TO THAT OF THE CLAIMS, CLAIMED PROPERTIES OR FUNCTIONS ARE PRESUMED TO BE INHERENT

Where the claimed and prior art products are identical or substantially identical in structure or composition, or are produced by identical or substantially identical processes, a *prima facie* case of either anticipation or obviousness has been established. *In re Best*, 562 F.2d 1252, 1255, 195 USPQ 430, 433 (CCPA 1977). "When the PTO shows a sound basis for believing that the products of the applicant and the prior art are the same, the applicant has the burden of showing that they are not." *In re Spada*, 911 F.2d 705, 709, 15 USPQ2d 1655, 1658 (Fed. Cir. 1990). Therefore, the *prima facie* case can be

rebutted by evidence showing that the prior art products do not necessarily possess the characteristics of the claimed product. *In re Best*, 562 F.2d at 1255, 195 USPQ at 433. See also *Titanium Metals Corp. v. Banner*, 778 F.2d 775, 227 USPQ 773 (Fed. Cir. 1985) (Claims were directed to a titanium alloy containing 0.2-0.4% Mo and 0.6-0.9% Ni having corrosion resistance. A Russian article disclosed a titanium alloy containing 0.25% Mo and 0.75% Ni but was silent as to corrosion resistance. The Federal Circuit held that the claim was anticipated because the percentages of Mo and Ni were squarely within the claimed ranges. The court went on to say that it was immaterial what properties the alloys had or who discovered the properties because the composition is the same and thus must necessarily exhibit the properties.).

See also *In re Ludtke*, 441 F.2d 660, 169 USPQ 563 (CCPA 1971) (Claim 1 was directed to a parachute canopy having concentric circumferential panels radially separated from each other by radially extending tie lines. The panels were separated "such that the critical velocity of each successively larger panel will be less than the critical velocity of the previous panel, whereby said parachute will sequentially open and thus gradually decelerate." The court found that the claim was anticipated by Menget. Menget taught a parachute having three circumferential panels separated by tie lines. The court upheld the rejection finding that applicant had failed to show that Menget did not possess the functional characteristics of the claims.); *Northam Warren Corp. v. D. F. Newfield Co.*, 7 F. Supp. 773, 22 USPQ 313 (E.D.N.Y. 1934) (A patent to a pencil for cleaning fingernails was held invalid because a pencil of the same structure for writing was found in the prior art.).

**COMPOSITION CLAIMS - IF THE COMPOSITION IS PHYSICALLY THE SAME,
IT MUST HAVE THE SAME PROPERTIES**

“Products of identical chemical composition can not have mutually exclusive properties.” A chemical composition and its properties are inseparable. Therefore, if the prior art teaches the identical chemical structure, the properties applicant discloses and/or claims are necessarily present. *In re Spada*, 911 F.2d 705, 709, 15 USPQ2d 1655, 1658 (Fed. Cir. 1990) (Applicant argued that the claimed composition was a pressure sensitive adhesive containing a tacky polymer while the product of the reference was hard and abrasion resistant. “The Board correctly found that the virtual identity of monomers and procedures sufficed to support a *prima facie* case of unpatentability of Spada’s polymer latexes for lack of novelty.”).

2112.02 Process Claims

PROCESS CLAIMS - PRIOR ART DEVICE ANTICIPATES A CLAIMED PROCESS IF THE DEVICE CARRIES OUT THE PROCESS DURING NORMAL OPERATION

Under the principles of inherency, if a prior art device, in its normal and usual operation, would necessarily perform the method claimed, then the method claimed will be considered to be anticipated by the prior art device. When the prior art device is the same as a device described in the specification for carrying out the claimed method, it can be assumed the device will inherently perform the claimed process. *In re King*, 801 F.2d 1324, 231 USPQ 136 (Fed. Cir. 1986) (The claims were directed to a method of enhancing color effects produced by ambient light through a process of absorption and reflection of the light off a coated substrate. A prior art reference to *Donley* disclosed a glass substrate coated with silver and metal oxide 200-800 angstroms thick. While Donley disclosed using the coated

substrate to produce architectural colors, the absorption and reflection mechanisms of the claimed process were not disclosed. However, King's specification disclosed using a coated substrate of Donley's structure for use in his process. The Federal Circuit upheld the Board's finding that "Donley inherently performs the function disclosed in the method claims on appeal when that device is used in normal and usual operation ' " and found that a *prima facie* case of anticipation was made out. *Id.* at 138, 801 F.2d at 1326. It was up to applicant to prove that Donley's structure would not perform the claimed method when placed in ambient light.). See also *In re Best*, 562 F.2d 1252, 1255, 195 USPQ 430, 433 (CCPA 1977) (Applicant claimed a process for preparing a hydrolytically-stable zeolitic aluminosilicate which included a step of "cooling the steam zeolite ... at a rate sufficiently rapid that the cooled zeolite exhibits a X-ray diffraction pattern" All the process limitations were expressly disclosed by a U.S. patent to Hansford except the cooling step. The court stated that any sample of Hansford's zeolite would necessarily be cooled to facilitate subsequent handling. Therefore, a *prima facie* case under 35 U.S.C. 102 /103 was made. Applicant had failed to introduce any evidence comparing X-ray diffraction patterns showing a difference in cooling rate between the claimed process and that of Hansford or any data showing that the process of Hansford would result in a product with a different X-ray diffraction. Either type of evidence would have rebutted the *prima facie* case under 35 U.S.C. 102. A further analysis would be necessary to determine if the process was unobvious under 35 U.S.C. 103.); *Ex parte Novitski*, 26 USPQ2d 1389 (Bd. Pat. App. & Inter. 1993) (The Board rejected a claim directed to a method for protecting a plant from plant pathogenic nematodes by inoculating the plant with a nematode inhibiting strain of *P. cepacia*. A U.S. patent to Dart disclosed inoculation using *P. cepacia* type Wisconsin 526 bacteria for protecting the plant from fungal disease. Dart was silent as to nematode inhibition but the Board concluded that nematode inhibition was an inherent

property of the bacteria. The Board noted that applicant had stated in the specification that Wisconsin 526 possesses an 18% nematode inhibition rating.).

**PROCESS OF USE CLAIMS - NEW AND UNOBVIOUS USES OF OLD
STRUCTURES AND COMPOSITIONS MAY BE PATENTABLE**

The discovery of a new use for an old structure based on unknown properties of the structure might be patentable to the discoverer as a process of using. *In re Hack*, 245 F.2d 246, 248, 114 USPQ 161, 163 (CCPA 1957). However, when the claim recites using an old composition or structure and the “use” is directed to a result or property of that composition or structure, then the claim is anticipated. *In re May*, 574 F.2d 1082, 1090, 197 USPQ 601, 607 (CCPA 1978) (Claims 1 and 6, directed to a method of effecting nonaddictive analgesia (pain reduction) in animals, were found to be anticipated by the applied prior art which disclosed the same compounds for effecting analgesia but which was silent as to addiction. The court upheld the rejection and stated that the applicants had merely found a new property of the compound and such a discovery did not constitute a new use. The court went on to reverse the rejection of claims 2-5 and 7-10 which recited a process of using a new compound. The court relied on evidence showing that the nonaddictive property of the new compound was unexpected.).

See also *In re Tomlinson*, 363 F.2d 928, 150 USPQ 623 (CCPA 1966) (The claim was directed to a process of inhibiting light degradation of polypropylene by mixing it with one of a genus of compounds, including nickel dithiocarbamate. A reference taught mixing polypropylene with nickel dithiocarbamate to lower heat degradation. The court held that the claims read on the obvious process of mixing polypropylene with the nickel dithiocarbamate and that the preamble of the claim was merely directed to the result of